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Hundreds flee Moluccas violence



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The conflict has devastated a once prosperous region

Hundreds of Christians have reportedly fled a remote island in the Indonesian Moluccas after a massacre by Muslims.

It is believed more than 500 people have been evacuated by ship from the island of Kasiui, east of the provincial capital, Ambon.

The reports came as Christian lawyer, Sammy Weileruni, said nearly 100 people had been killed in late November after refusing to convert to Islam.

Mr Weileruni said the attacks were carried out by members of the Muslim paramilitary Laskar Jihad group.

There was no independent confirmation of his account.

However a government spokesman said the Laskar Jihad had raided two Christian villages on 24 November with bombs and other weapons, killing 54 people, burning two churches and hundreds of houses.

He said extra troops had been despatched to Kasiui this week to prevent further outbreaks of violence.

Holy war



“ It was obviously people from the outside who initiated the attack ”

Government spokesman John Tomaso

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Former Indonesian diplomat Des Alwi
"I've never heard of people being forced to become Muslim"

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Baroness Caroline Cox, member of UK's House of Lords
"Christians have received threats that there will be no church bells ringing in Ambon this Christmas"

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The violence in the Moluccas, previously known as the Spice Islands, has left thousands dead in the last two years and created hundreds of thousands of refugees.

The conflict intensified earlier this year with the arrival of volunteers belonging to the Java-based Laskar Jihad, whose members have declared a holy war.

Mr Weileruni said a man who escaped Kasiui by boat at the weekend told him nearly 100 Christians had been slaughtered.

"The forced Islamisation of Christians in Kasiui island has been continuing since last week and by Saturday, a total of 93 people had been killed for refusing to convert to Islam," he added.

Mr Weileruni said the man had told him that more than 760 Christians on the island had agreed to convert to Islam out of fear for their lives.

But a former Indonesian diplomat Des Alwi, now a community leader in the Banda islands to the south, said he had not heard anything about forced conversions.

He suggested the violence was carried out in revenge after a recent Christian attack on a speedboat travelling from Ambon to the island of Saparua.

“ There are good Muslims who want to protect, while there are bad people who want to slaughter

”
Ambon priest Agus Waleluyan

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